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WALKING IN A UNISEX SALON, AN EMERGING SERVICE SPACE IN URBAN INDIA

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to explore the emergence of engendered beauty space, Unisex Beauty Salons in India. The paper sets out discussion on understanding the drivers of unisex salons, their distinctive marketing appeal and potential of Indian entrepreneurs in unleashing the story of unisex salons in the emerging market, India. The study develops case studies of emerging national brands in the unisex salon segment. The study also uses alternative motivation theory derived from optimal distinctiveness theory to understand the adoption of novel beauty space shared by men, women and the third gender in context to the larger Indian society. Interesting insights such as Indian society being majorly male dominated yet, finds greater acceptance of unisex salon service where space is easily shared by all genders. Also, the ease of being served by opposite gender employee at unisex salons is something new to the Indians. The craze to follow popular culture, being part of cosmopolitan lifestyle and ease of visiting the salon with spouse, friends and family combined with the effect of social media and cost-effective business model has pushed the growth of this segment. Right from big players in the organized sector such as Lakhme to cult creators such as Jawed Habib, each one is exploring the new the version in their own way. India has its own take on unisex salons. From the luxurious unisex salon found in the upwardly areas of metro cities to the unisex family salons that exist with partition between the male and female segment.

The entrepreneurs who wish to venture into this domain must understand the regional culture that exist in vast country India, and must then design their marketing appeal to capitalize the opportunity in the unisex salon segment.

Keywords: Unisex salons, Emerging markets, Male and Female grooming, Enrich Salons, Javed Habib Hair and Beauty Salon, Lakhme He & She

INTRODUCTION

Unisex derives its origin from the word universal meaning applicable to everyone. The term denotes not only equality but the traces the transformation grooming space has undergone over the year from beauty parlours and salons to unisex beauty salons. The beauty space globally has undergone tremendous change. From to being a gender specific place to being a place shared by all, whether men, women and the third gender. The emergence of unisex salon can be traced backed in the year 1960 in USA. The unisex salons then, challenged the dominance of barber shops as only places for men and capitalized on challenging the traditional notion of masculinity (Peiss,2000)

Today unisex salons have become next door option in the western world. Emerging economy like India, is no exception to this phenomenon. Indian cities are witnessing mushrooming of unisex salons thanks to the effect of globalization and media. For Indians, these salons which serve a certain class of customers looking for ambience and professional service are becoming a preferred option over beauty parlours and barber's shops meant by for men and women respectively. The unisex salons are finding greater acceptance among the cosmopolitans in mega cities and tier I cities of India and are fast catching up in tier II cities as well. The market size of the global beauty industry is estimated to be 1.4 trillion US dollars and the expected compounded average growth rate for the next half of the decade to be at 15% (NADC & KPMG Report 2017). The report also estimates that as the global market size of beauty and wellness segment increases, emerging economies like India, China, Brazil and Indonesia would be the next promising markets.

Before beginning to understand the phenomenon, an anecdote would do justice. Shubhra, a college going girl from a metro city in India has recently moved from only women beauty parlour to a unisex salon in the city. She is here to get a haircut from a male employee who is known for giving best haircuts. Shubhra appreciates the gender free concept and is comfortable with a male employee help her with the pedicure and manicure. But she ensures, that the unisex salon she visits, has no camera policy to keep her privacy intact. With these mixed feelings of welcoming a new concept and concern for safety, unisex beauty salons are fast making their way into metro and non-metro cities of India.

The grooming industry is said to be getting a "makeover" in form of Unisex salons a new domain. With increase in purchasing power and growing need to look better every day the demand for beauty services is increasing. In India, beauty practices are centuries old however, these latent desires have come to surface as more women and men are seeking it on day-to-day basis. Men, in particular are seen as the new horizon. According to the Enrich salon data, men account for 35% of total footfall and 40% of the total revenue. An article in Economic Times by Preethi Chamikutty, 2012 on branded salons, the desire for grooming, being styled and pampering oneself is felt increasingly by the great Indian middle class. The article emphasizes the growing importance of beauty which according to the author is pampered by beauty salons.

Back in nineties, uttering the word unisex was possible only in a whisper. Visiting a unisex salon was still a faraway dream. The term 'metrosexual' was yet not introduced to general public in India. Gender was a clear demarcation line. Beauty parlours for women and barber shops for men were distinct places each catering a mix of benefits. They are perceived as places of retreat, place for social interaction and were part of monthly relaxation regime.

Another article titled "Men and their beloved Barber Saloons", in the Hindu Business Line, (May 2019), explained the general shift of men from the local saloons to branded unisex salons. The article which begins with an anecdote of the author visiting, 'Manohar hair cutting saloon' in Lalbaug area of Mumbai as a place of value for money describes hair cutting and shaving as the only beauty aspirations of men performed as monthly rituals. Anything beyond this was tabooed for men. Whereas, a women's perception of beauty against men was more than just haircut which included skin and face too. Usually the posters 'Ladies only' were very easily found in the neighbourhood run by an enterprising woman.

So, then what changed the game? Why did men gradually started shifting to branded salons from saloons? Or why did gradually women move to haircuts by the hands of an expert like Jawed Habib who, was also the cult creator the category unisex?

The metros in India are witnessing an increased number of high-end salons which are in the domain of unisex offering expertise, comfort and luxury under one roof. These changes have occurred gradually leading to creation of new business model in India is what the researcher desires to question. Identifying factors leading to emergence of new business domain such as the unisex is being conducted through secondary data analysis. The unisex salon segment is studied explicitly through developing case studies of unique yet successful business and entrepreneurial ventures in unisex salon such as Lakhme He and She, Enrich Salons and Jawed Habib Hair and Beauty Limited.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the words of (Etcoff 2000), beauty is a universal concept and is a part of human experience which provokes pleasure, rivets attention and impels actions. Beauty can be viewed as personal but its perceptions and beauty practices have universal applicability. It is a socialized concept. Beauty cannot be defined objectively. However, sociologists are of the opinion that it is culture and society that exert major influence in describing what beauty means for people from different cultures. The western tradition of aesthetics has defined beauty as 'a quality apart'. Beauty is also considered as a 'signifier of differences' but, what stands as a signifier have been influenced by culture and society. Different cultures define beauty in different ways but the basic perception about physical beauty and appearance are found to be common across cultures. Beauty is majorly conceived in the physical form. According to (Robinson & Ward, 1995) at societal level beauty is perceived as physical characteristic and is a measure of social acceptance and satisfaction.

With time immemorial feminine and beauty have been also closely associated. Beauty has been observed as a quality connected with women and a societal attribute a woman needs to possess. At a very early age the idea of beauty is observed to be inculcated in women and beauty becomes an important determinant of their happiness and unhappiness. Similarly, the act of regarding beauty as one of the most prominent quality in a woman is also observed among many cultural around the world (Adams, 1977).

Indian beauty aesthetics and beauty standards which can be studied from depiction of art and specifically from the depiction of women in art and poetry reveals the dominance of 'Hour glass' figure. The studies of early sculptures of women from different era's such Mauryan era and Sunga era and sculptures in Sanchi suggest a preference for S shaped or curvy figures of women. These forms suggest feminine images and beauty standards predominant in the past.

However, there is no perfect definition, of beauty, it only has a reference point i.e., standards or ideals. These references help people to form perceptions to which people adhere too. However, point to be noted is, these standards of beauty are not static but keep changing with time. These standards or ideals serve as the benchmark. Ideals of beauty are influenced by social relations, institutions, culture, politics and economics. (Kathy. P, 2005).

(Baghel, Parthasarathy & Gupta, 2014), conducted an ethnographic study of five beauty salons in Mumbai, researching beauty from urban setting point of view. According to them it is a symbolic capital for status enhancement and an idealistic concept that people aspire for and that beauty which is sold as tangible goods and intangible services to women and increasingly to men is closely connected to the term 'Fashion'.

However, it has been observed that due to global influences and confluence of multi cultures the cultural standards related to beauty in India are narrowing (Gelles, 2011). Rather conformity to international beauty standards is been observed in the Indian beauty discourse. These standards are greatly influenced by media by way of marketing appeals and capitalization of motives such as physical attractiveness. Other factors such as constantly changing appeals, through use of media and advertising have helped the business of beauty flourish. (Basu, Lim & Ng, 2018)

Print media has played a significant role in expanding western beauty ideals and has helped global beauty corporation to grow exponentially. According to, International Herald Tribune, 2004, the growth of magazine was accelerated due to marked liberalization that opened in most countries allowing FDI in print media.

It is through the socialization process that beauty and its changing ideals spread and media has successfully done this by settings standards of beauty. (Savani et al. 2015), further adds, that the motivation for adhering to the standards may be influenced by factors such as level of industrialization. Taking ahead this point, (Inglehart & Wayne, 2000), observed that the more industrialized a nation is people demonstrate more individualistic approach towards life. However, against this, the less industrialized and traditional economies reflect more collective approach towards following standards. The resultant effect is, increase in demand of products and services related to beauty is felt increasingly more by societies that are motivated through collective approaches observed (Sampson, 2001). Asian countries such as South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong for example are leading nations per capita wise towards spending on beauty products. (Euro monitor, 2017)

The business of beauty flourished with sale of goods to provisions of service in new and innovative ways. The salon business was successful in embarking the self-consciousness appeal through face and body. They were majorly operating at local level but were able to synchronize with standards of beauty disseminated through media. With respect to the west, the rise of 'Unisex' salons in 1960's challenged the dominance of barber shops as only places for men to have access to. These salons capitalized on challenging the traditional notion of masculinity. (Frith, 2005).

In India grooming places for men and women were clearly demarcated by gender. Barber shops were meant for men and beauty parlours for women. Men and their barber shops and women and their beauty parlours catered a mix of benefits. These places were seen by both as places of retreats and social hubs. (Harish Bhatt, 2019) an article titled, "Men and their beloved barber shops" in The Hindu Business Line May, 2019 explores the importance of grooming needs in men catered by barber shops. The article describes Hair-cutting and shaving as the monthly rituals that men generally cherished. Unlike men a women's perception of beauty is not just hair but its more holistic which includes hair, skin and face.

So, what did the barber shops offered men? They offered simply a haircut and a shave at an economical price which served them as value for money places. It served the male beauty needs which concentrated more on hair and hair styling. Hair styles became the new metaphor for a personality men carried. A pony tail for instance would mean a creative personality and well-groomed beard would reflect modern, confident and a cool personality.

They also meant a social place for chatting and meeting friends. They represented the yesterday's WhatsApp version with physical interaction.

Similarly, for women beauty parlour meant a place of social interaction and recreation. The parlour in the neighbourhood which clearly read "Ladies only" were run by an enterprising woman.

Then the question arises is when men and women in India were being happily served under different roofs what factors led to combining their places of recreation and lead to occurrence of Unisex Beauty Salons.

There is extant literature on Beauty salons, practice of beauty by men and women but factors that have led to creating unisex salons is still poorly addressed. With the intention to study the gap in present literature. The researcher raises the following research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What factors drive the emergence of unisex beauty salons in India?
2. What makes a Unisex salon different than other gender-based salon?
3. Why are single gender beauty salons taking the route of Unisex?
4. What is the marketing appeal of Unisex salons?
5. How have entrepreneurs in India tapped the potential of unisex salons?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is a qualitative in nature. The researcher has used one on one interview method to understand this new service domain of unisex salons. For which the operators/owners who have shifted from operating a men saloon or women beauty parlour to operating a unisex salon were contacted for the interview. As the researcher wished to understand the growth of this sector, small operators forming inorganized part of this sector or micro level entities were interviewed.

In-depth interviews with unisex salon operators from Pune City region was conducted. Only those unisex operators who have the experience of operating a unisex salon for a minimum of one year or more were considered. Out of the contacted operators only 25 salon operators who have been into unisex salons were interviewed. Apart from this, researcher has developed conceptual cases of three salons in the unisex salon segment namely Lakhme Him and Her, Enrich Salons and Jawed Habib Unisex salons and Hair expresso which are unisex in nature. Here, while developing the case studies, unisex salons from organized sector were only considered. The study has also based on secondary data.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The study includes of developing a comprehensive understanding of the beauty and its changing perceptions in emerging economy India. The study envisages to identify and understand factors that have led to emergence and growth of Unisex salon in India. The period of study is confined to post 1990 reforms in India and growth of beauty and wellness industry post 1990 in India till October, 2021.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is largely based on personal interview of salon owners from Pune City conducted between August 2021 to October, 2021.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Putting on makeup, dressing up for the occasion, reaching office in customary dress codes and visiting salons for rejuvenation. When one reads the line who is one imagining off? A female or a Male? The answer would be in most cases, a female or yes it could be a male too because males are also expected to follow customary dress codes, look appropriate and presentable. So, beauty is no more a characteristic only related with females. As the Indian society is witnessing shift in the gender roles in day-to-day life so, are gender and beauty perceptions. This is where an, engendered place of beauty practice is fast catching up among the youth in metro cities of India which is 'Unisex Beauty Salons'. A unisex salon is a place where men, women and sexual minorities share their grooming space. But this definitely has not happened in a day.

In the discussion that will follow the researcher attempts, to understand factors identified from the extant literature such as globalization, urbanization and Cosmo urban culture, media influence, social and cultural factors that have driven the emergence and growth unisex salons in India.

A study of business history reveals that, business and society both affect each other. As changes in cultural and social environment leads to create newer needs businesses emerge to satisfy these needs. Also, businesses in turn create newer needs through new marketing appeals. Like for example, early 90's advertisements carried the ideas of beauty as cleanliness and hygiene. However, as the global beauty industry expanded the marketing appeal changed from hygiene to enhancing beauty, personality development and self-empowerment. (Sengupta & Frith, K., 1997)

India since its change of economic profile in 1991 has emerged as a new market with potentials to consume. In India, women in general had to choose from two brands of lipstick and cold cream prior 1990 (Runkal, 2005). However, the new economic era ushered the entrance of international brands, growth of urban population and middle- income groups which in turn increased the capacity to consume exponentially. According to (Parameswara & R K Srivastava, 2011), India is a country in transition. The Indian economy not only witnessed economic growth but has also observed increased women workforce participation and increased demand for branded goods post 1991. Growing urbanization and easy access to international brands have given the needed push to beauty industry in India.

(Baghel, Parthasarathy & Gupta, 2014) in their study on beauty salon in Mumbai observed that, the new service economy emerged which created a new class of employees employed in offices, malls and hospitality to mention a few. The dress code culture and looking appropriate was the need of this upcoming service economy. It required both the men and women to look presentable. There by, making visits to beauty places a routine affair. In the history of Indian beauty markets came a legendary time when beauty pageants such as Miss World and Miss Universe were won by Indian women. Since then, beauty practice got be accepted and internalized by all sections of Indian society. It also helped to engrave the western beauty ideals on the psyche of Indian consumers. The impact of media and global beauty was such that in a culture that celebrated inner and moral beauty more emphasis was given to external beauty. Best example of this is Indian matrimonial adds which ask for fair and good- looking partners. Also, a brand that has fuelled the desire for fairness among Indian with wheatish and brown skin for so long, is a brand of fairness cream 'Fair and Lovely'. Not only was it successful in selling fairness but helped the Indians carve a very feminine female identity, using gender as a base. Whereas for a macho men look the men are asked to fetch 'Fair and Handsome'. This in fact has created a new narrative of modern lifestyle. Modern living and way of life places a lot of importance to body, beauty and attractiveness. Though the company has recently dropped the term fair and instead used

‘Glow and Lovely’ after facing criticism of supporting racialism and ‘Black Lives Matter’ marking an era of change.

There were similar changes observed at cultural and social level too. Women work participation increased and the so called masculine public space until now dominated by men was challenged. The public space in India and in most South Asian countries is observed to be dominated by men (Runkal, 2005). As men and women at large started to share public space in urban India the researcher argues that, the comfort and ease that has been developed over the years of sharing public space have, in a way carved the way for sharing beauty space too. The comfort and participation by individuals in cosmopolitan culture of India led to create the new version that is Unisex Beauty Salons where, men and women share space.

Culture, is observed to be another important factor leading to shape and strongly impact behaviour. It shapes our perception as members of culturally inclined group and affects our choices. It is said that beauty lies in the eyes of beholder but it is cultural and social factors which train the eyes of the beholder to perceive beauty. Every culture has its own beliefs and values however, cultures are also at constant flux too. Over the period of time, it has been observed that simple and small cultures tend to coalesce into more complex and mega cultures. So is true for simple and smaller cultures at emerging economies to coalesce global values and beliefs into their culture and join the mega culture (Harari, 2011). If India, is to be studied in reference to Hofstede’s Cultural dimensions, it is largely a collective and masculine society. There is a greater preference placed on belonging to larger group and success is determined by validating material gains. Hence a tendency to adhere to popular culture is more in India, which can be observed with increasing preference for beauty services and acceptance of unisex culture.

Another factor after culture that exerts influence and, in a way, gets impacted is Media. Media, in particular plays a significant role in disseminating beauty ideals and the importance of appearance and grooming. (Goffman, 1976), observed that beauty magazines in particular exploited gender relations and cultural norms to carry messages depicting gender roles and identity. The media is able to create a representation effect and enables people to aspire for standards represented. The media largely capitalized the representation effect in creating identities about personalities, beliefs, values, attributes (Burton, 2011). Print media and magazines in specific have served as a strong medium to collaborate the global beauty corporations, advertising agencies and global media in expansion of western beauty ideals observed Frith, Shaw and (Cheng, 2005). Print media was used as advertising vehicle. Magazines such as Femina, Cosmopolitan, Meri Saheli and Grihashobha are a few magazines which are known for disseminating the required effect on its readers in India. According to (Isa & Karmer, 2003), magazines carry a ‘collective psyche’ that moulds the reader’s perceptions and beliefs.

Hence, in an emerging economy like India when at first factors at macro level such as globalization and liberalization occur changes take place at micro level leading to impact the choice of consumer. These in turn creates a popular culture where gender difference tends to reduce and social places tend to shrink in the form of Unisex Salons. This is what makes a unisex salon different from only men or women salons. Secondly, it the cost structure through which the marketers are seen capturing the value. This business model is able to capture value by offering the same service to different genders under one roof. This has helped the operators to effectively distribute fixed cost from sales contribution, leading to earn more profits per rupee. Also, the average ticket size for male customers in hair and skin segment is comparatively less than female customers. Men’s’ saloon which were only serving men are increasingly converting to unisex salon to take the benefit of higher ticket size of the female customers as skin has a larger margin than hair segment. If comparing the male to female customer’s ratio the unisex salon attracts 60% more females than males. Unisex hair salons, in particular have witnessed sharper increase in outlets and customer base the reason being small ticket size in unisex hair salons and cost-effective model to capture the value from younger age group. Wagh. S. (2020).

Thirdly, service quality matters to both places in a men’s saloon as well as in a women’s beauty parlours. Luxury and comfort are provided at both the places. Yet, the unisex concept-based salons enable individuals to participate in the cosmopolitan culture and lifestyle. This can be better understood with the help of alternative motivations theory derived from Optimal Distinctiveness Theory proposed by (Yaron T. and Tal Katz. N, 2008) which helps in understanding and forecasting the new product adoption. According to the theory, consumers can be divided into two broad categories, one with need for assimilation and one with need for distinctiveness. Customers with the higher need for distinctiveness are early innovator who influence the

early adopters, as the number of adopters increases, it further motivates the early majority who places relatively more importance on the number of users. Greater the users, greater is the acceptance of novel service or product from the society and their need for assimilation is satisfied. Applying this, in the context of unisex beauty salons a similar situation can be observed in metro cities of India. Beginning with mega cities, unisex salons are receiving greater acceptance from consumers from tier I cities and further into tier II and III cities. As, the unisex salon find larger acceptance among the youth and mid aged professional, they further create a bandwagon effect influencing the late majority and the laggards.

The unisex salons provide a platform to so called participants who wish to become part of the popular culture which is shrinking urban space of beauty practice.

For further understanding the growth of unisex salons, the researcher develops cases of successful unisex salons each from a distinct category and attempt to trace the growth trajectory of unisex salons from unorganized sector to organized sector.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Lakhme Salons for Him and Her

A brand which was always perceived to be only women's brand was seen venturing into the unisex domain through Lakhme Salons for Him and Her. Lakhme which achieved a place of prominence in the field of Indian beauty segment was known for exclusively serving the women's segment. However, it realized that men are becoming more and more careful about their appearance. Keeping in mind the grooming need of men and shrinking gender space they extended their salon services to women and men under roof in the name **Lakhme salons for Him and Her**. The colour theme is purple which a unisex and precisely helps define the salon its unisex identity.

The salon business has proved to be a growth model for Lakhme as it able to increase the sale of its beauty products and tap the urban male market segment. It has definitely gained an advantageous position being an early entrant to the unisex domain. Lakhme has adopted the Franchise mode of expansion with its focus on serving the metro cities of India. Company looks at salon business as one that is promising them turnover, profits and brand equity. Since the time of its inception in 2011 it has grown and in the year 2012 it started its state-of-art salon in unisex called Lakhme Absolute. Lakhme salons are present in 125 cities of India and has more than 280 entrepreneurs who have partnered via Franchise with it.

Case Study 2: Enrich Salons

The next case is the first unisex salon in Mumbai, the **Enrich salons**. Established in the year 1997 by an entrepreneur Mahesh Bhatt in Mulund, Mumbai. They were the first mover in the domain of Unisex Salons. Enrich, which means to improve quality or enhance the quality of something, usually by adding something rightly markets itself as place to enhance oneself. The Logo 'Enrich You' displayed outside their salons speaks aloud of the motto. It strives to carve an excellent customer experience which it promises to deliver consistently across all its outlets. This has rightly helped Enrich to expand into 50 salons in Metro cities across India such as Pune, Bangalore, Ahmedabad and Mumbai. Enrich which serves the age group between 20 to 45 had 70% women customers.

However, it is witnessing a gradual shift in its customer profile where, more men have started visiting the salon. Footfall of men have gradually started increasing. Men today account for 35% of their customers and 40% of its revenue comes from the male segment. Also, it's the younger age group makes for its maximum customers. Customer between the age group of 20 to 25 visit the most. College students are also among these. The average amount spend by this age group is around Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 3,000. With Enrich offering lowest ticket size of Rs.50 for basic services and Rs. 5,000 for special services such as hair colouring and spa enables it increase the footfall of customer from different income categories.

CASE STUDY: 3**The Third Case is the Cult Creator Jawed Habib Hair Espresso and Salons (Unisex):**

Habib, a third-generation hair dresser is one of the leading figures in the beauty and wellness sector of India. It was Jawed Habib who took the hair dressing from the streets to the high streets by adding the very needed expertise, understanding of science and luxury. Habib identified the gap in the Indian markets and capitalized on it. According to him India, is an attractive market but it is difficult to penetrate into this market. Jawed Habib's understanding of its target customer led him to penetrate into this so-called difficult territory. According to Habib, the generation of today has a busy schedule but is image conscious, too. The customer prefers to be groomed in the shortest time, in the best possible way and at affordable price and this is here that Jawed Habib Hair espresso and beauty salons comes in. The Jawed Habib Hair and Beauty Ltd. serves tier I and tier II cities with smaller pockets. With this Jawed Habib filled the brand vacuum in the wellness industry absent in smaller cities and towns. He adopted the method of Franchising to expand his business which led him to open 870 salons in 24 states across 110 cities with approximately 15,00,000 customers to its credit in India.

These three leading examples are a measure of growth of unisex salons in India. The potential for growth of the unisex salons segment through entrepreneurial efforts has definitely more opportunities in the urban India. At macro level too, growth of salon business is expected to create a positive effect on growth and employment. At all India it is expected generate 122 lakhs new jobs by 2022. No doubt these brands are adopting franchise method of expansion. One of the major reason of salons converting into unisex or taking the unisex route is cost. Cost of operation is the leading reason why the traditional barber saloons are getting a facelift by going unisex. The barber shops operators by simply employing an additional hairdresser for females or learning female hair dressing can incur the same cost for different gender and realize a greater rate of return than previously. However, it was observed, that out of twenty five unisex salon operators interviewed, twenty one barber shops run and operated by a male took on to the path to unisex salons. Only four out of twenty-five female's owners of beauty parlours converted to unisex salons. Women in general who operate beauty salons or parlours were observed to be hesitant of converting to the unisex salons.

CONCLUSION, ENTERPRENERIAL IMPLICAITONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.

Salons, which are meant to be places of beauty and beauty enhancement have become an important part in the life of modern Indian consumer. Factors such global beauty standards, increased awareness, affordability and access to international brands opened doors to exponential growth of beauty and wellness segment. Media has been successful in rightly placing the meaning of beauty in the mind of consumers who place a significant weightage to physical beauty and attractiveness. While, India matures as a growing service economy, the need to look beautiful and presentable is realized by both men and women. Urban Cosmo culture which enables sharing public spaces leads to sharing of beauty spaces too. Unisex salons are rightly capitalizing the popular culture of access to gender free spaces and lifestyle wanted by the younger population. For the young men and women looking forward to participate in the cosmopolitan culture of the city these salons serve aa readymade platform. The unisex salons sell the emotional appeal of love thy self and self-care by enabling consumers take charge of how they should look. Cost of operation and similar service attributes are major reasons for growth of as unisex mode of operation leads to create a growth of Unisex salon in the Metros, Tier I and Tier II cities. It is very evident through the case studies of successful entrepreneurial attempts that it is extremely important to be customer oriented. Understanding the trend and moulding the offering in a way suitable to the need of the customer is the key.

Major brands in the organized segment are seen to be entering this segment and adopting the franchise mode of expansion. As India enjoys demographic dividend, version such as unisex that appeal to the younger group are expected to give the provided lead in growth and employability. As, the adoption rate increases in India smaller saloon and beauty parlour owners, can consider shifting to unisex salon in smaller cities. The bigger players in the business can think of moving to the tier II and tier III cities through franchise mode, as moving to these cities will any time be preferable as the cost of operations and rentals are low compared to metropolitan and tier I cities.

As emerging economies around the world mature a similar phenomenon can be intercepted, observed and studied.

The study can be further explored as to understand the perceived benefits and risk of adopting a unisex service, such as privacy concern and insecurity of opposite sex employee serving the customer. The same can be further taken for comparative studies across tier I, II and III cities for better understanding of the cliental. The versions of unisex salons found in India, such as with partition, without partition, family unisex salon is still under researched and need to be considered. Also, study of unisex salons is majorly done only from two bi-gender point of view, the third gender or the gender minorities point of view could also be studied to further the understanding.

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